

Draft revision sent to
Paul Walsh 5/29/75.

The 1967 Saigon Order of Battle Conference

During the spring and summer of 1967 the Intelligence Community was tasked to produce a Special National Intelligence Estimate, SNIE 14.3/67, Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam. During the preparation of this SNIE, the Intelligence Community was unable to reach agreement on the order of battle figures and estimates of communist forces in South Vietnam. Representatives of both MACV and CINCPAC were invited to the drafting sessions to present their position, but after extended debate it was apparent that agreement could not be reached.

Therefore, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Wheeler, and the Director of Central Intelligence, Mr. Helms, agreed to send a delegation from the Washington Intelligence Community to Saigon to discuss the issues with MACV in the hope that a consensus judgment on these numbers and strength estimates could be reached. The Washington delegation was headed by the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs (Mr. George A. Carver, Jr.). It included the Chief of the Far East Staff of the Office of National Estimates (Mr. William Hyland), two analysts from CIA's Directorate of Intelligence (one, the head of the Office of Current Intelligence's Indochina Branch; the other, Mr. Adams), two analysts from the Defense Intelligence Agency, and one analyst from the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence

Mr. Adams' account of that September 1967 conference in Saigon has some elements of fact and a considerable amount of distortion. The discussions were difficult and the MACV representatives were decidedly reluctant to consider raising the numbers of any category of communist forces. Mr. Adams' account is inaccurate, however, in several major respects:

a. Mr. Adams' allegation that on the third day of the Saigon conference "we received a cable from Helms that, for all its euphemisms, gave us no choice but to accept the military's numbers" has no basis in fact. There was no such cable.

b. What Mr. Adams terms "the military's numbers" were not, in fact, accepted. Here Mr. Adams' argument gets beclouded by a certain ambiguity and confusion between two key terms: "force" and "order of battle."

(1) "Order of battle" is a technical term relating to organized military units and their strengths. (Like all technical terms borrowed from conventional war situations, it was not easy to apply in Vietnam, but there it was used -- at least by CIA -- to refer to those components of the communist force whose members generally served full time on military duties and were virtually all armed.)

(2) "Force" is a more general, all-encompassing term including the total pool of at least quasi-organized individuals on whom the communists could draw, including individuals who did not serve full time on Party duties (military or civil) and who, if armed at all, might have only, say, a pistol or one or two grenades. (Members of the "force" were, of course, identified -- by the communists -- and available for assignment or impressment into more organized military units, including guerrilla units, included in the "order of battle.")

(3) Personnel or units not included in the "order of battle" were not necessarily excluded from the total communist "force." Indeed, the latter (by definition) was much the larger, since it included everything the "order of battle" included and much that the latter did not.

c. Even where Mr. Adams is correct in saying that certain components of the communist structure were not included in the "order of battle" figures, he is wrong in implying that they were ignored or in alleging that they were "frog-marched out of the estimate."
(Continue with Annex A, 3rd paragraph) --

The attached table presents the quantitative